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SUBJECT: MOHR HOSTS FOUR-DAY HUMAN RIGHTS EVENTS

¶1. Summary: The Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) hosted four days of events throughout the country to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the declaration of human rights. The highlight of the events was the first annual human rights conference in Baghdad on December 3. The conference focused on human rights issues facing the ministry, the Parliament's human rights committee, the KRG, and civil society. The conference was widely attended and was covered by many media organizations. UNAMI also held a human rights celebration on December 7 in Baghdad. The event featured speeches from Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salim and SRSG Staffan de Mistura, a performance by the Iraqi National Symphony, and an art contest from students from Iraqi art institutes. End Summary.

#### MOHR EVENTS

¶2. In honor of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly December 10, 1948, the Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) held a series of events December 1-4. The highlight was the first annual human rights conference on December 3. On December 2, the MoHR inaugurated its Human Rights Institute, which will be located at the Ministry's headquarters and will hold trainings and workshops on human rights for NGOs and GOI human rights entities. The Ministry sponsored sporting events for children around Iraq on December 1 and provided them with backpacks and jackets with the MoHR logo. Throughout the four days, TV channels featured human rights awareness programs and commercials from the MoHR.

#### FIRST ANNUAL HR CONFERENCE

¶3. PolMinCouns and PolOff attended the MoHR's human rights conference on December 3 in the Mansour Hotel in Baghdad. The conference was well attended by GOI officials and human rights NGO members. Several media outlets covered the event and aired footage on Iraqi news channels. Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salim opened the event with a speech highlighting the importance of human rights issues in the country and the GOI's efforts to promote human rights.

¶4. The most substantive part of the conference was a panel discussion featuring representatives from the MoHR, Parliamentary Human Rights Committee, the KRG MoHR, and the NGO sector. MoHR Director General for Humanitarian Issues Sa'ad Fathallah discussed the relationship between the improved security situation and adherence to human rights, stressing that as the GOI conducts successful security operations, the human rights situation should improve. He said the respect for freedoms of expression and press and the expansion of NGOs has improved. However, he said the rights of women and children had deteriorated, and sectarianism had become worse.

¶5. Judge Zakia Hakki, a member of the Parliament's Human Rights Committee, spoke about the need to pass legislation that would enumerate constitutional rights, such as freedom of press and speech. She said the Human Rights Committee monitors human rights violations, visits detention

facilities, and investigates terrorist acts. Discussing establishment of the High Commission of Human Rights, which was recently passed by parliament, Judge Zakia said the commission and the MoHR should co-exist since the two bodies will complement the other's work. The independent commission will be able to report and monitor on human rights without bias, and the MoHR can improve human rights from within the executive branch. She also criticized the Ministry of Justice for blocking parliamentary committee inspection visits to detention facilities. Iraq's executive branch needs to learn how to work with the parliament on human rights issues, she noted.

¶16. The representative from the KRG MoHR read a paper on the work of the Ministry in the Kurdish region. The Ministry focuses on monitoring prisons and detention facilities, monitoring and improving the situation of women and children, holding conferences and trainings on human rights, supporting human rights NGOs, and reporting on overall conditions every three months. The Ministry conducts regular inspections to most detention facilities in the KRG. It also conducts training programs on human rights standards for prison officials and holds workshops on prisoners' rights for the detainees. The Ministry closely follows the situation of women and children, particularly violence against women. It visits orphanages and women's correction facilities and holds programs and lectures on women's rights around the region. The Ministry representative cited the weakness of monitoring authorities such as the Parliament and the media, Islamic extremism, culture and traditions, and the fact that Iraqi laws do not meet the standards of international human rights agreements as the main obstacles limiting the Ministry's

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effectiveness.

¶17. The director of the Iraqi NGO Al-Amal, Hanaa Edwar, spoke on behalf on the NGO sector. She said security and law and order were generally better, particularly in Baghdad, which is encouraging refugees and IDPs to return. Edwar said life was returning to normal for residents in Basrah and Maysan. However, she claimed that Iraq is still facing serious challenges to human rights: there are still mass arrests and detainees being held too long without charges, kidnappings for ransom are still common, and child kidnapping has increased. She said a resurgence of tribal traditions is negatively affecting the rights of women. Edwar claimed that 70 percent of IDPs are women and children and they suffer more because they have less employment options.

UNAMI HUMAN RIGHTS EVENT

¶18. On December 7, the UNAMI Human Rights Office sponsored an event in honor of the 60th anniversary of the declaration. The event highlighted the connection between human rights and Iraqi fine arts. SRSG Staffan de Mistura opened the event by praising the work of the MoHR and welcoming the new High Commission of Human Rights. The SRSG said more work needs to be done on improving detention facilities, reducing honor killings, helping minorities, and ending impunity for torture and other abuses. Minister Wijdan highlighted the need for Iraq to continue its journey to raise human rights awareness and protect the human rights of all citizens.

¶19. Following the speeches, the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra String Quartet performed "Song without Borders," which was composed in honor of the Declaration of Human Rights and given to the UN. A group of students from two arts schools in Baghdad presented their human rights-inspired paintings, which had been hung on the walls of the auditorium. The SRSG, Minister Wijdan, and the two professors judged the artwork and gave prizes to the artists who best expressed their thoughts on human rights.

COMMENT

¶10. The MoHR conference and the four-day celebration helped raise the public visibility of the Ministry and raising public consciousness of the importance of human rights in Iraq. It was encouraging to see the MoHR successfully promote its (ambitious) agenda; the media coverage of the conference and other events will help the Ministry get its message across. The UNAMI support was also important in lending weight and credibility to the MoHR events of December ¶7.

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